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NUTRITION PROGRAM NEWS

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EXTENSION SERVICE PROGRAMS PROMOTE GOOD NUTRITION

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Extension Service specialists, home agents or home advisors (as they are called in some States) conduct programs in many areas of home economics to help families achieve and maintain desirable levels of family living. Nutrition, of course, is one of the areas covered. A variety of programs, designed to guide people of all ages to nutritional health, is being conducted by Extension workers alone or in cooperation with staff of health and educational groups in rural and urban communities over the Nation.

In this issue of Nutrition Program News, we describe three continuing programs that have proved promising. They may be helpful to you as you plan programs to meet similar community needs. The first, in California, is designed to promote good normal nutrition for all family members by extending the nutrition background of homemakers and community workers (home economists, public health nurses, social workers) who deal with nutrition problems of families. The second, in Illinois, is also planned to promote good family nutrition by extending the nutrition background of young homemakers. The third, a Virginia program, is a cooperative venture to promote desirable weight levels for adult women through the wise selection of food.

NUTRITION "SCHOOLS" IN CALIFORNIA

In 1959, the California nutrition specialist and home advisors in Fresno County recognized a need to provide basic nutrition short courses to professionals who use nutrition in their work, such as public health nurses, social workers, and some home economists, and to homemakers who want advanced nutrition information.

The first courses were offered by home advisors and consisted of six weekly 2-hour sessions. Other counties made similar offerings. By the end of 1962, 43 such courses had been given. All reports are not yet in, but there is every indication that an increasing number are being conducted in 1963. Workers found that using the terms "school" or "course" is more appealing than "meeting." The participants seem to consider these terms have a connotation of prestige or dignity.

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Procedure

Students are attracted by various types of advance publicity on radio and television, in newspapers, and in circular letters, home advisor's monthly newsletters, and a promotional brochure, "Food and You," which contains information about the subject matter, dates, meeting place, and procedure for registering. Requiring registration has proved an important part of the procedure. It seems to make prospective participants take the experience more seriously. Fewer persons drop out between the time they indicate interest and the opening of the "school." Some courses are still held for professionals, but the majority of participants now are homemakers.

All "schools" now consist of four weekly, 2-hour sessions. They are held in the morning, early afternoon, late afternoon, or in the evening to make them available at convenient times for professionals and homemakers, many of whom work outside the home.

Presentations

One of the nutrition specialists prepared an outline of material to be covered in each session. Primary emphasis is given to helping people of all ages achieve and maintain good nutrition through wise food selection. She has also written guidance material for (1) distribution to class members and (2) home advisors conducting the classes. Visuals for these presentations include sets of charts, slides, and use of overhead projectors, all of which are available to home advisors from the State office.

Informal Evaluations

Surveys showed that a new and expanding audience had been reached. From 60 to 80 percent of those attending had no previous contact with Extension services.

Many women indicated that they attended to get accurate, realistic subject matter that would be helpful to them in their daily living without having to join an organization.

A substantial number of professional people participated and extended their background in nutrition and in methods of teaching nutrition. In turn, these professionals in allied areas taught homemakers. The actual number of homemakers reached in this manner is difficult to estimate.

The "schools" have also helped inform the public of the services home advisors can give in all areas of family living. In many cases, this has helped home advisors to become the recognized home economics leaders in their counties.

FOODS AND NUTRITION WORK WITH YOUNG HOMEMAKERS IN ILLINOIS

Many young women today have assumed and been overwhelmed by the responsibilities of homemaking and child-rearing before they are out of their "teens." Nutritionists and other community workers have recognized a need to help young homemakers in many areas of family living, particularly in feeding their families nutritionally adequate meals. A special series of meetings on foods and nutrition for young homemakers has become a part of the foods and nutrition program of the Illinois Cooperative Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics.

Planning

After several planning sessions, "The Foods and Nutrition Short Course—for Young Homemakers" was developed by the foods and nutrition specialists, a county home adviser, two county Extension Council representatives, and three young homemakers.

Initially, the short course was planned for homemakers 30 years of age or under. As work progressed, the planners discovered that the age of the homemaker was less important in qualifying her as a "young homemaker" than the ages of her children or the number of years she had been a homemaker. Middle-aged women with young children or women of any age with little experience in homemaking were often beset with problems similar to those of the chronologically young homemaker.

It also developed that persons who were neither brides, expectant mothers, nor mothers of young children, but who worked with young children were interested in this course. For example, teachers hoped to learn how to include foods and nutrition activities in their classroom programs.

Informing Potential Students

All advance publicity emphasizes the importance of the material and its scientific basis. Releases stress that the course is presented by the University of Illinois Home Economics Extension Service and is planned for homemakers with young families, brides, and young women about to be married. The course is made up of five presentations and includes the following topics: Family Food Needs, Meal Planning, Food Buying, Cooking as A Science, and Cooking as an Art.

The course is usually offered at least one afternoon and repeated at least one evening a week for five consecutive weeks. Baby-sitting service is provided without charge. (Women from homemaker Extension units volunteer for this service.)

Recruitment results from newspaper, radio, and television announcements of the course; posters placed in grocery stores, beauty parlors, self-service laundries, and factory bulletin boards; and from letters to clubs, service organizations, and business organizations to which many potential students belong.

Presentations

Subject matter included under each topic area and points of emphasis are chosen to meet the interests and needs of the specific group.

At the first meeting, the women fill in a registration questionnaire that includes a listing of "major problems" in feeding their families. The first meeting also includes a discussion of (1) the role of food in achieving good nutrition, and (2) the identification of food sources of specific nutrients. Class members are also requested to keep weekly records of the food served at home for the first 2 weeks of the course.

The food records of each class member are evaluated by the teacher and returned with written comments. This is an excellent source of information for the teacher and is helpful to the women. For example, in one class, the records revealed the need to (1) stress fruit and vegetable consumption and (2) provide meal planning aids. This information, along with that gained from the questionnaires and the class discussions, is the basis for planning the presentations that are to follow. Plans are revised each week if the need arises.

More emphasis is now given to food buying, food and kitchen management, and food preparation than was given in the earlier classes. Young homemakers are indicating their interest in running their homes well and in cooking well-planned meals that their families enjoy. Those concerned with conducting this course are considering the feasibility of increasing the number of lessons.

Interest is maintained by using a variety of communication techniques. Visuals include an overhead projector, flannelgraph, chalkboard, newsprint pads, and slides. Short demonstrations and group discussions also provide a change of pace that adds interest to the meetings. Suitable reference materials are distributed each week and reading assignments are made to help the women prepare for class.

Results of Careful Planning

Reports of the response to the program indicate that it met a very real need and that the women enjoyed the experience.

The size of classes in Illinois counties varied from 16 to more than 60. One county had an afternoon class of 16 and an evening class of 30. Class members who could not attend their regular group meeting were welcome at the other one. The fact that many women availed themselves of the flexibility planned into the program is indicative of their respect for the help offered and their interest in the approaches used.

Workers' Evaluation

The specialists concluded that the success of the program was due in part to the limitation of enrollment to women concerned with similar problems. The use of the age of family members rather than the age of homemaker as an enrollment qualification resulted in effective recruitment. Good advance publicity also spurred attendance.

Tailoring programs to meet the defined needs of the group also contributed greatly to the success of the program. This point was illustrated by the statements of class members. One woman wrote that she had had courses in food preparation and nutrition, but nothing as direct as this, or maybe it came just at the needed time. Another wrote, "I answered the newspaper article and came myself. Now I'm sharing the information with the whole neighborhood over coffee."

VIRGINIA HOME AGENTS TEACH NUTRITION THROUGH WEIGHT-CONTROL CLASSES

The nutrition specialist and home demonstration agents in Virginia saw an opportunity to teach good nutrition through wise food selection to overweight women who wanted to attain and hold a desirable weight.

A plan was developed to use the group method of losing weight that employs the principle that people will do many things together that are difficult for them to do alone—the same principle used by Alcoholics Anonymous. The motto is "Don't go on a diet; change a food habit."

The Virginia Council on Health and Medical Care and the State Department of Health concurred with the plan.

Procedure

Home demonstration agents are advised to discuss the entire plan with local health department physicians and nurses and to request their cooperation in making the local program a success.

The county medical society is also contacted, the plan explained, and the interest and backing of member physicians requested. Many physicians are pleased to suggest to overweight patients that they join these groups.

Often county or local nutrition committees help organize and conduct these programs because the primary purpose is in line with the committee's objectives.

Each woman who wishes to join the group receives an application form that sets forth the objectives of the program, a bit of the philosophy involved, and space for a physician's approval.

Presentations

Most counties have a 4-month program and meet bi-weekly. Each woman is asked to bring to the first class her application, which indicates her physician's approval and the weight loss he considers desirable for her. Pictures are taken of the woman as a "before" shot with the clear understanding that this picture will not be shown without permission. Everyone weighs in. Weight records are begun. A balance scale is used for this purpose and the "weighing in" procedure for each meeting is explained. In some classes, each participant also keeps her own weight chart. The women are cautioned about unrealistic expectations; the aim of this plan is a weekly weight loss of 1 pound, not more than 2.

Each person is requested to (1) record all food eaten for 2 weeks, listing each day's food on a separate page in a notebook, (2) calculate calories as nearly as possible for each food, and (3) bring the food record to the next meeting. Weight-control reference materials are distributed to help the women understand the plan, keep reasonably accurate food records, and estimate caloric intake.

Other meetings include explanation of a food pattern as a guide to wise food selection. Emphasis is placed on the individual's need for all nutrients with some restriction of calories to control weight. Group members can then check their own food records with the pattern for (1) adequacy, and (2) restriction of calories. Some groups keep detailed food records throughout the course; others keep food records the final 2 weeks of the program for comparison with the first set of records. From this the woman can see how her eating habits have changed—the true answer to weight control as far as food is concerned.

Discussions generally included are: "What Causes People to be Overweight," "The Dangers of Overweight," (both

led by physicians), "Fad Reducing Diets" (dietitian, physician, nurse, or home economist), "The Importance of Activity in Weight Control" (health educator—possibly a "Y" instructor), "How to Select Refreshments and Snacks" (often a demonstration by a utilities home economist, Dairy Council director, home demonstration agent or other professionally trained food demonstrator), "Low Calorie Meals or Desserts Demonstration," and "Choosing Clothes to Look More Slender." Visuals, such as food models, posters, slides, filmstrips, and films add effectiveness.

The last meeting is usually an achievement or recognition meeting. It may be a low-calorie luncheon or tea. All who have made significant losses (10 pounds or more) have "after" pictures taken and receive certificates. This is usually a "fun" meeting. Members are encouraged to reflect with humor on the "trials and tribulations" encountered in modifying their food habits.

The aim of 1 pound per week (not more than two!) means that weight losses would amount to not more than 16 to 32 pounds in the 4 months—all that many need to lose. The really obese person, if she has successfully followed the pattern, can go ahead by herself.

Evaluation of Program

In the 9 years since the plan was initiated, 72 counties have conducted weight-control programs in which more than 1,500 women were enrolled. About two-thirds of these completed the 4-month course. The total weight loss was more than 17,000 pounds and the average weight loss was between 11 and 12 pounds. The average age of the women was 48 years.

A followup study was made in 1959. The purpose was to learn whether the women had maintained the weight loss achieved during the classes. If not, what kind of help did the homemaker feel she needed and what improvements, if any, could she suggest for later classes.

One hundred and eighteen of those completing the weight-control program in 10 counties were contacted. Of these, 35 had lost more than 8 pounds since the course was over. On the other hand, 51 had gained more than 10 pounds. These women said they needed the encouragement of the group and would like a followup class.

All of the women said they know they can lose weight if they can find some way to be continually motivated.

They also reported that the nutrition they learned helps them select and prepare nutritionally adequate meals that their families eat with pleasure. This result alone would make the course worthwhile whether or not the women maintained their weight loss.

When asked about changes in habits, the women said that they were (1) selecting their food combinations more carefully (2) trying to eat less food—this was the most difficult change to make and not all were successful in continuing it—and (3) choosing methods of cooking to conserve nutrients but not add calories.

IN CONCLUSION

Nutritionists—both in basic research and in the applied field—recognize that improving the nutrition of a population group depends more upon effective communication of nutrition information to those persons who need it rather than a "breakthrough" in some area of basic research. Of course, there are still unknowns, but we do know enough to advise combinations of food that will promote desirable levels of health.

Nutritionists, including Extension personnel in community programs, have continued to work diligently to (1) help people of all ages to benefit from the established knowledge and (2) communicate sound information as a protection against the unscrupulous pseudoscientist who would bilk the public.

Experience with many groups at the community level has produced some basic concepts that can be a guide to the development of effective programs for most individuals. The popular programs described here have several of these concepts in common:

- All avenues of communication between professional nutrition workers and the homemakers must be kept open and used effectively to reach the groups most in need of assistance.
- Programs must be "tailored" to the needs of the particular group being contacted. Approaches, too, must be consistent with the interest, maturity, and comprehension of the group. This cannot be achieved without careful study to define problems, meticulous planning of programs flexible enough to meet needs, and frequent evaluation to measure results.
- No one group can do the entire job alone. Working relationships and mutual understanding among representatives of allied professions must be established and maintained.

It may seem to take a long time to see positive results of educational programs. Experience, however, has taught that a public informed of the basic principles of food selection and convinced that good nutrition promotes good health is most likely to apply this knowledge (1) to daily living and (2) to discrimination against the faddist.